

# **Recommendations and Policy Options: Virginia's Self-Sufficiency Programs and the Availability and Affordability of Child Care**

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JLARC staff typically make recommendations to address findings during reviews. Staff also sometimes propose policy options rather than recommendations. The three most common reasons staff propose policy options rather than recommendations are: (1) the action proposed is a policy judgment best made by the General Assembly or other elected officials, (2) the evidence indicates that addressing a report finding is not necessarily required, but doing so could be beneficial, or (3) there are multiple ways in which a report finding could be addressed and there is insufficient evidence of a single best way to address the finding.

## **Recommendations**

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

The Virginia Board of Workforce Development should rewrite policy number 300-02 to comply with the requirements of §2.2-2472 of the Code of Virginia that each local workforce development board shall develop and enter into a memorandum of understanding with each local department of social services for the coordination of services. (Chapter 3)

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### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending §63.2-610 of the Code of Virginia to require that each local department of social services develop and enter into a memorandum of understanding with its local workforce development board concerning how the entities will coordinate to deliver workforce development activities to Virginia Initiative for Education and Work and SNAP Education and Training clients. (Chapter 3)

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### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

The secretary of labor and the secretary of health and human resources should coordinate to develop for all Virginia career works centers (VCWs) and local departments of social services (i) a region-specific inventory of workforce development resources; (ii) guidelines for local department and VCW staff to improve the extent to which TANF and SNAP clients are connected with Virginia's workforce development resources; (iii) a guide to eligibility and participation requirements for TANF, SNAP, and workforce development programs; (iv) guidance on how participating in the state's workforce development programs can fulfill TANF and SNAP program requirements; and (v) best practices to foster integrated service delivery between local departments of social services and VCWs for TANF and SNAP clients. (Chapter 3)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act to dedicate a portion of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding reserved by the governor for statewide workforce development initiatives to facilitate the co-location of Virginia Career Works staff at local departments of social services on a part-time basis. (Chapter 3)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

The secretary of labor, secretary of health and human resources, and leadership at the Virginia Department of Workforce Development and Advancement (VDWDA) and Virginia Department of Social Services should evaluate whether administering all or some aspects of the Virginia Initiative for Education and Work and SNAP Employment and Training programs through the VDWDA and the Virginia Career Works centers would be beneficial and report the findings as well as any recommendations to the Virginia Board of Workforce Development, House Committee on Commerce and Energy, and Senate Committee on Commerce and Energy by October 1, 2024. (Chapter 3)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should contract with a third-party expert to (i) determine the information needed to be collected from local departments of social services ("local departments") to establish modern caseload targets for local social services benefit programs; (ii) collect this information in an accurate and timely manner; (iii) establish caseload targets; (iv) and develop a tool and procedures for local departments and VDSS to monitor workloads on an ongoing basis and update caseload targets as needed. (Chapter 4)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

The Virginia Department of Social Services should evaluate, on at least a quarterly basis, local departments of social services' ("local departments") spending of their Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) services funding to (i) determine the extent to which funds are being spent on client workforce and supportive services, (ii) identify the reasons local departments are not fully spending funds allocated for client services, and (iii) help local departments identify opportunities to fully spend funds on services that would help VIEW participants improve their employability and earnings potential. (Chapter 4)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should revise Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) program policy to encourage local departments of social services to use available VIEW supportive services funds to pay for clients' child care costs when they cannot be covered by the Child Care Subsidy Program, and VDSS should proactively inform all local departments of social services and their local boards of this change. (Chapter 4)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 9**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act to direct the secretary of health and human resources and the secretary of labor to design and implement a pilot program for testing an alternative assessment and planning process for Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) clients that uses an interdisciplinary team of program and service providers to develop long-term service plans for clients that encourage progress toward self-sufficiency during and after the clients' participation in VIEW. (Chapter 5)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 10**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act to direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to establish a pilot program to assess whether the use of financial incentives would positively impact clients' participation in education and training programs. (Chapter 5)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 11**

The Virginia Department of Social Services should monitor data from each local department of social services on (i) VIEW clients' work participation rate and (ii) departments' sanctions for non-compliance with work participation requirements on at least a quarterly basis and report the results of this monitoring to the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services and House Health, Welfare and Institutions committees annually. (Chapter 5)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 12**

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should regularly monitor intermediate progress and outcome measures for the clients of the Virginia Initiative for Education and Work program. VDSS should monitor these measures for each local department of social services, and the results of this monitoring should be reported annually to each local board of social services, and to the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services and House Health, Welfare and Institutions committees, beginning October 1, 2024. (Chapter 5)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Social Services to pursue participation in the outcome-based performance measure pilot program authorized under the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 and to provide quarterly updates to the Virginia Board of Social Services regarding the process for applying for and implementing a pilot program through this federal opportunity. (Chapter 5)

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 14**

The Virginia Department of Education should review and improve the Virginia Pre-service Training for Child Care Staff course to ensure the material is relevant, useful, and applicable to all staff at child care centers and that staff are only required to take training that pertains to their roles and responsibilities. (Chapter 6)

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### **RECOMMENDATION 15**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act that requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to issue payments to Child Care Subsidy Program vendors based on authorized enrollment, subject to the attendance threshold established by VDOE, on an ongoing basis. (Chapter 7)

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### **RECOMMENDATION 16**

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and Virginia Department of Social Services should develop and implement a process to reimburse subsidy vendors based on children's enrollment rather than attendance as soon as possible, but no later than January 1, 2024. Once this process is in place, and until a new automated attendance tracking system is operational, VDOE should discontinue tracking children's attendance through the current "swipe" system and instead collect attendance data from vendors. (Chapter 7)

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### **RECOMMENDATION 17**

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act that limits the amount of time families are eligible for the Child Care Subsidy Program while the parents or guardians search for work on a full-time basis to 90 days per job loss occurrence. (Chapter 7)

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## **Policy Options to Consider**

### **POLICY OPTION 1**

The General Assembly could amend § 63.2 of the Code of Virginia to require each local department of social services to offer SNAP Employment and Training. (Chapter 5)

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